



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Arrest of Defrocked Radical Priest in Georgia

As delivered by Deputy Representative Douglas Davidson
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 18, 2004

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I hope I am able to return to a point on Georgia that was raised earlier by the distinguished Ambassador to Canada. It is one that we ourselves have raised a number of times in the past at the Permanent Council and I am referring to the case of the defrocked Georgian Orthodox priest Basili Mkalavishvili and his violent creed of religious intolerance. This former priest has led a numerous attacks against followers and places of worship belonging to of minority religions in Georgia.

The United States welcomes the news that on March 12, the Georgian authorities finally arrested Mkalavishvili in Tbilisi.

While the arrest itself is a positive development, the manner in which it was conducted gives some cause for concern. Television images prompted many observers to accuse the authorities of excessive use of force.

We look forward to seeing Mkalavishvili prosecuted for his alleged crimes in a fair and open trial, and we hope these developments are a sign that freedom of religion will receive full respect throughout Georgia.

At the same time, we call on the Georgian authorities to review their arrest practices and to restrain from unnecessary violence or use of force against demonstrators.

Thank you.